

THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

they were not re-opened until 1935 by Robin's special treaties. The Metropolitan market always remains, but the high cost of freight makes this an unsatisfactory outlet. Nor can compensation be hoped for through an immediate adjustment of the internal market, which, however, has not been so badly hit as that of metal mining. An effort has also been made to consolidate efforts and to reduce the cost price. By 1933 the Hongay *Sodete des Charbonnages* had absorbed its rivals, and the whole group now represents 78 per cent of the colony's total production. In 1936 the production of anthracite represented an increase of 30 per cent over 1935.

Almost all the colony's gold mines were known to the natives and the Chinese, but abandoned long before the French came. Although the French, too, have found them unprofitable to work, there has been inevitably a certain vogue in connection with gold mining. The Myden mine in Tonkin was the first to attract public attention, but it was located in an unhealthy region which also presented a complicated labour problem. The Attopeu mines in Laos have the same shortage of labour. This discouraged the company which had been working there, so it turned first to copper and later to tin. An exception to the general rule of the inaccessibility of the colony's gold is the Tourane mine of Bong Mieu. It has been markedly profitable because of its situation in a healthy, accessible region, where labour is available and nearby waterfalls supply the power.

Although gold in small quantities has been found in almost every country of the Union, its importance is not great, and it is usually too costly to extract. As with most mining history, it presents the drawbacks of inaccessibility, labour shortage, inadequate

capital, technical ignorance, and extravagant expenditure. Moreover, the metal market is more precarious than that of coal because it is essentially artificial.

Indo-China belongs to the principal stannic regions of the world, but it is a small producer of tin. Up to 1922 Tonkin was the only place where tin mines were worked—ever since 1906. The extraction of tin was favoured by the high War prices, but this was partially offset by the scarcity and cost of freight transportation. Prices fluctuated during the post-War years until 1923, when the Laotian mine of Pataam was discovered and worked. The tin output was thereby increased* and it has remained practically stationary since that time. Although Laotian tin has to bear costly transportation charges before it reaches the sea, from which its Burmese and Siamese rivals do not suffer, this expense is not prohibitive in view of the value of the metal and the richness of